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ABSTRACT

A framework for the study of discourse, based on the analysis of three superordinate features of discourse (asymmetry, hierarchy, and continuum), is proposed in this paper. The paper begins by noting the confusion in terminology that exists in the world of composition pedagogy and theory; pointing to the need for a framework for testing, synthesizing, and organizing insights; and suggesting defects in James Kinneavy's "semiotic framework" for the study of discourse. It then discusses the three superordinate features of discourse, which have a crucial bearing upon the problems of classification: asymmetry (the condition that form is not equal to, and does not predict, meaning); hierarchy (both the hierarchy of forms and categories that constitute the system of communication, and functional hierarchies used in creating discourse); and the continuum of forms (referring to categories of form and function that extend into one another by gradual stages). Finally, the paper presents and discusses five diagrams that outline the proposed framework for the study of discourse. The first diagram illustrates the hierarchy of discourse categories, while the others elucidate the following specific categories: the aims of discourse, rhetorical genus, discourse strategies, and the modes of written discourse. (GT)

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AIMS, MODES, AND THE CONTINUUM OF DISCOURSE

The subject of this paper is frankly theoretical, but I believe it has a direct bearing on the kinds of things that composition teachers do. I want to address the fundamental question of what the "aims" and "modes" of discourse are--or at least how we can most usefully and accurately define these terms. In this paper I am going to talk more about ways of asking the question than about answers; and while I am going to provide some tentative answers, I will not even attempt to provide formal justifications or defenses. In this limited space I shall have to rely on whatever sense I can convey of the promise that my suggestions may hold for directing and clarifying research on some of the fundamental concepts in the field of composition and discourse.

As anyone who has read the surveys of aims and modes by Frank D'Angelo[1] and James Kinneavy[2] (or has examined five or six of our commercial textbooks) could attest, the world of composition pedagogy and theory is a wonderland of confusing, overlapping, and conflicting terminology. Most of the confusion stems from our traditional inability to distinguish form from function, material from formal from final causes, and to discover stable relationships among them; and one of the causes of this inability is surely the richness and trickiness of discourse itself. James Britton has remarked, in stoical tones, that there is simply no adequate way to classify discourse products.[3] If this is true, there is an equal and opposite truth, and a more illuminating one: There are dozens of ways

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that are at least partially adequate. The classifications of aims and modes listed in the aforementioned surveys derive from a large number of fields of inquiry, from semantics and the philosophy of language, to psychology, to anthropology and the various social sciences. Actually, this should be neither surprising nor alarming, when one considers the nature of discourse itself. The inescapable circumstance is that all forms of specifically human organization depend upon, are predicated upon the existence of, discourse--itself a form of organization that is specifically human. It stands to reason that any system of thought that elucidates humankind will also elucidate discourse. A lot of different sorts of things are true.

So where do we go from here? It seems obvious to me that, given the plurality of truth in this matter, an initial task of the theorist is not so much to choose among the competition or devise something new, but rather to elucidate a framework for testing insights, synthesizing them, and organizing them. Where is such a framework to come from? Certainly not from any special linguistic, psychological, or sociological theory, for that would place it in immediate competition with other theories and defeat its own purpose. It needs to be derived intrinsically, from observations about the nature and properties of discourse itself, defined in the broadest possible way.

Let me give an example of the confusion that can result from the absence of such a framework. A particularly volatile concept in our field is that of "mode," and one of the reasons for this volatility is the profoundly remarkable potentiality of discourse at every level for transformation. The authors of a fairly good, recent textbook declare that "Describing," "Narrating," and "Informing"--each of which gets a

separate chapter--are separate rhetorical modes--each of which differs from a fourth category in another chapter called "Writing to Support a Point."[4] Now I think it ought to be fairly clear that describing and narrating ought to be ways of either informing, writing to support a point, or both. As a matter of fact describing or narrating that did neither would by most standards be considered bad writing; and describing or narrating that had no intention of doing either would be, as Kinneavy has noted, pathological.[5]

Here is a more fanciful example. It could be said that right now in this essay I am using the expository mode. If my subject matter required me to give my audience an account of my failings and inadequacies, someone might declare that I had switched to a "confessional" mode. Or if it suddenly became apparent that I did not mean anything I was saying, then someone might declare that I had switched to the "ironic" mode. Now each of these usages is perfectly legitimate in ordinary language, because the word "mode" simply means a manner or way of doing something. But at the same time it is fairly obvious that exposition, confession, and irony are not concepts of equal status. It is entirely likely that something could be expository, confessional, and ironic all at once.

It just won't do to say that, Oh well, you know, these categories always overlap. We need to recognize that in asking the question, "What are the modes of discourse?" we are asking an empirical question only in part. We are really asking something like this: Given a range of concepts that have some bearing upon the way or manner of proceeding in discourse, what different sorts of things do they refer to? And how do these different sorts of things relate to one another? To what different categories of action or being do they belong?

The set of concepts to which we give the name "modes" will take its definition partly from empirical description, but also from the place we assign to it in a larger system of concepts. It is only within such a system that notions such as "aim" and "mode" have any stability.

I am well aware that in calling for such a system I am not exactly talking about things unattempted yet. The most Notable effort in this direction has been James Kinneavy's A Theory of Discourse. I have presented some detailed criticisms of Kinneavy's excellent book elsewhere,[6] and I will not go into them here. I will merely suggest that Kinneavy's "semiotic framework" for the study of discourse suffers from at least two defects. The first is that the so-called communications-triangle, while it offers a very convenient heuristic for examining discourse and discourse concepts, simply does not provide sufficiently rich or powerful criteria for classifying discourse products. The aims or basic kinds of discourse are not, after all, fixed natural or psychological categories but complex historical developments, and they must be defined accordingly, in terms that denote the ways in which clusters of motives and traits may come together in more-or-less typical discourse situations.

A second defect of Kinneavy's theory is that it does not speak very well to the problem of the relationships among different sets of concepts. This is nowhere more apparent than in his (admittedly) tentative typology of modes, where we are first told--although we are not shown how--that this is an application of the communications triangle, but then on the next page we are advised that, actually, "these four modes of discourse are not an application of the communications triangle. They actually are grounded in certain

philosophic concepts of the nature of reality considered as being or becoming."[6A] The problem here is that Kinneavy's typology of modes is neither generated, nor tested by, nor does it fit very well into, his larger framework.

I wish now to propose an alternate framework, one which derives its justification from a set of answers to this question: Are there salient features or characteristics of discourse in every application of the term, from grammar and phonology to the study of texts in their cultural settings? I want to suggest that there are such superordinate features, that their analysis can guide us in the attempt to discover and organize a system of discourse classifications, and that each of them affords some particularly useful insights about the nature and the effects of the written medium. In this paper I will limit the discussion to three superordinate features which have a particularly crucial bearing upon the problems of classification.

Asymmetry

The first is the feature of asymmetry, the pervasive condition that form is not equal to--does not predict--meaning. While the processes of history may attach certain associations to certain forms--for instance the association of political corruption with phrases like "at this point in time"--there is no necessary relation between the two, and the associations themselves can be transcended, shucked off, or placed in dramatic opposition to other associations. In linguistic analysis this is a commonplace. Individual sounds or phonemes have no intrisic value, and the relationship between the form of a word and its meaning is usually arbitrary. At the level of syntax the phenomenon is even more striking, as both traditional and transformational grammarians remind us: Different surface patterns will express the

same functional or grammatical meanings, and conversely, a single pattern will yeild a variety of such meanings. (There is, of course, among human beings an interesting counter-impulse, toward the stabilization of meanings and forms, and toward the restriction of forms to specific contexts. But the processes of linguistic and social change and sheer human creativity are usually victorious, and the feature of asymmetry, along with the possibility of infinite use it entails, remains intact. It could be that one of the functions of linguistic change itself is to preserve this necessary condition.)

At higher levels of analysis, the asymmetry principle is equally conspicuous, although we often ignore it in our attempts to classify discourse. Provocative as such attempts as Kinneavy's are, to connect discourse modes with corresponding views or aspects of reality, they tend to be undermined by the fact that a single mode or form can be appropriated to a number of different purposes--narration as a mode comes quickly to mind.

Sometimes, of course, unconventional or novel appropriations of forms are wholly deliberate, and these are theoretically much more interesting. Even such high-level generic concepts as "romance," "book review," or "recipe," which carry with them fairly concrete expectations of purpose and value, have a fundamental volatility about them. Not only do the purposes and values and stylistic appointments of such entities change over time; they are subject to extension, transformation, or appropriation into alien territory in the hands of a single clever or creative author. Anyone who has read Chaucer, James Joyce or Laurence Stern will understand this point. Thus what I am calling asymmetry--the phenomenon which at the level of linguistic

system manifests as the arbitrariness of symbols, at the level of consciously prepared discourse in social contexts manifests in the highly self-conscious phenomena of masking and generic appropriation. We encounter such transformations most often, to be sure, in literary art, but they are by no means foreign to other kinds of discourse, particularly rhetoric. One person's act becomes another person's agency. And the medium of writing and print, since it separates author and audience in space and time, intensifies the condition, encouraging authors to try out alternate voices, increasing the opportunities for masking and generic appropriation.

The feature of asymmetry has several possible applications to the problem of aims and modes. First, we should recognize the dangers in trying to equate forms of discourse with facets of reality or of rhetorical purpose, and we should also examine the terminology we use for ambiguity; but beyond these practical suggestions, recognition of the asymmetry principle can provide an initial basis for synthesizing and organizing a range of discourse concepts. The basic organizing device would be the placement of these concepts, or groups of concepts, along a scale ranging from material to final causes: form to meaning or purpose.

HIERARCHY

The second superordinate feature of discourse is the principle of hierarchy, indispensable to any organization of diverse entities into purposive system. Language is such a system, and so are discourse products--essays, poems, novels. Hence the study of discourse involves the examination to two types of hierarchy: the hierarchy of forms and categories that constitute the system of communication; and the functional hierarchies that humans make use of in creating discourse. Of

special interest, again, is the circumstance that the medium of writing encourages and intensifies the urge toward hierarchical as opposed to linear, or what Walter J. Ong has termed "rhapsodic"[7] forms of order.

There are at least two applications of the hierarchy principle to the study of aims and modes. First, this principle provides an additional means of organizing and testing concepts. As we envision a series of categories ranging from material to final cause, it is apparent that the resulting arrangement will be a hierarchy of categories which bears a close relation to the kinds of functional hierarchies found in actual discourses. Thus of a particular discourse notion we can ask not only the hypothetical question, Does it refer more closely to material, means, or ends of discourse? We also ask the related empirical question, To what extent is it subject to appropriation and transformation--that is, of being subordinated to larger ends in a particular act of discourse?

Second, the principle of hierarchy, in addition to encouraging clarity about the status of concepts, can help us to reduce confusion about the so-called overlap and mixture of forms and categories. One of the worst things that our textbooks do is first to identify such items as comparison, description, analysis and so on, erroneously as forms or modes of discourse, and then to explain hazily that these forms are "combined" or "mixed" in actual discourse products. In the case of the items named, what we are dealing with here are <u>strategies</u>--a middle level of concept--that can be employed in a variety of <u>modes</u>--a lower level of concept--and which fit into more or less elaborate discourse hierarchies toward the fulfillment of certain <u>aims</u>--a

higher level of concept.

CONTINUUM

The third superordinate feature of discourse that I am going to discuss is the continuum of forms. In discourse, as in most of life, there are no hard and fast categories. At every level of analysis, from the discernment of phonological types to the discernment of genres and functions of discourse products in their cultural settings, we encounter continuous phenomena--by which I mean to indicate categories of form and function which extend into one another by gradual stages, and in which the value or consistency of a form is approached by the value or consistency of neighboring forms. The most interesting linguistic studies of continuous phenomena have been conducted by John Robert Ross,[8] who is able to demonstrate that even such seemingly discrete categories as noun and verb come together along a grammatical continuum. Some nouns are "verby" and some verbs are "nouny." If this is true at the level of grammar, how much more likely is it to be true at higher levels which are much more responsive to the pressures of history and human invention. I think it can be demonstrated that modes, aims, and various categories in between exist along various formal and functional continuums within categories.

Once again, as with the features of asymmetry and hierarchy, we can recognize special ways in which the medium of writing intensifies things. Oral discourse--speech-making in particular--is a context and situation-oriented medium; its aims, genres, and modes tend to cluster around occasions, forums, recurrent kinds of public situations. One's access to audiences is limited, it is brief, and it is usually conditioned upon more or less definite expectations and conventions.

Aristotle's division of speeches into deliberative, forensic, and epideictic kinds is based principally upon this circumstance. The medium of writing, on the other hand, is not radically situation-oriented in the same way that speech-making is, and this circumstance makes possible a much more fluid range of aims, modes, genres, purposes, and motives. And thus the problem of classification is aggravated, as the possibilities of discourse are enriched. The continuum of discourse tends to "fill out."

The principle of continuum, like the principle of hierarchy, is an important way of defining and organizing concepts. Important discourse notions should of course be derived empirically, and important features should be described empically; but the ultimate definitions of these concepts will be relational, especially at the levels of aim and genre. Rhetoric, to name the most conspicuous example, is uniquely open-ended. It forms continuums with all other kinds of discourse--Instrumental, Scientific, Poetic. And this is an important defining feature of rhetoric itself.

Let me turn now to the proposed framework, which is outlined in diagram 1 and fully elaborated in subsequent diagrams. There is little space here for detailed discussion of specific items. I have elaborated on some of these items in other places,[9] and some of them remain frankly tentative. For the moment I will confine myself to some general remarks about the system and about the major categories in it.

Diagram 1: Hierarchy of Discourse Categories (Material to Final Cause)

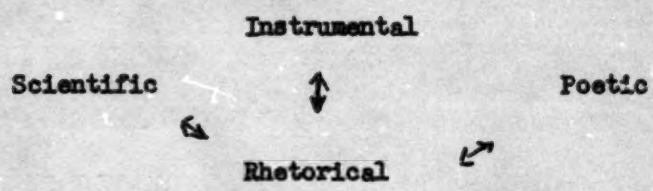
Medium (Writing/Print)	Mode	Strat[illegible]	Aim
A. Format essay dialogue interview etc.	Discursive Expressive Expository Affective	Material Logical/Topical Formal Generic Modal Stylistic	Instrumental Scientific Rhetorical Poetic
B. Paragraph	Narrative Expressive Expository Affective		Genus (Rhetorical) Deliberative Performative Reflective Informative
C. Sentence	Dramatic Expressive Expository Affective		Genre (de facto types)

The first thing that should be pointed out about this framework is that it is not a general theory of discourse, although it certainly relates to one; it is a special theory of written discourse, and specifically of written discourse products--that is to say, complete and more or less unified and deliberate transactions in writing, of the sort that one normally encounters in print. The framework thus is informed by two matters of crucial importance that are often overlooked by discourse theorists. The first is the distinction between discourse-in-general and the "discourse act" or "product" as defined above, which calls into play the relation between purpose and conventional situation as an important definer of fundamental types.[10] The second matter is the special attention given to the written medium, which has important ramifications not merely at the level of form but also at the levels of strategy and function.

An additional significant feature of the framework is that it is not, as Kinneavy's system at least partially partially attempts to be, predictive in any way, but rather organizational and directive. It does not tell us what the aims and modes of discourse are; it provides guidelines for defining, testing, and organizing concepts. In my view, this is the proper role of theory in humanistic inquiry.

Some brief remarks, next, about the individual categories.

Diagram 2: The Aims of Discourse



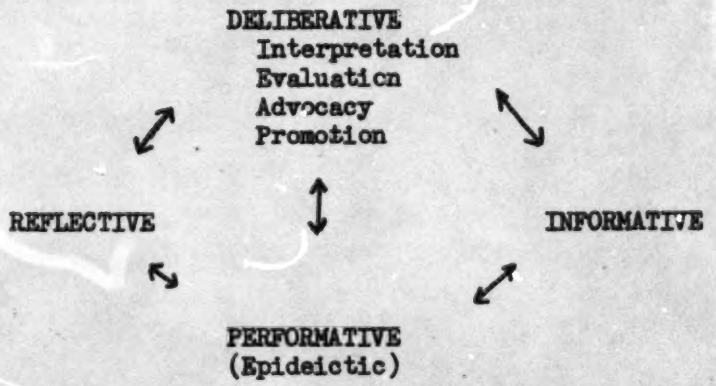
(Arrows indicate relationships of continuum.)

AIMS

The aims of discourse are the final causes of discourse, and final cause in discourse products, as Karl Wallace has effectively pointed out, is not something that can be discovered or classified by unitary criteria.[11] These are composite notions, depending upon the clustering of various factors, typical purposes, fields of subject matter, author-audience relationships, criteria for success, and real or implied situational contexts. Furthermore, they are historical developments, directions in the process of specialization that has accompanied the development of rational and technological civilization--a process in which writing itself, as Walter J. Ong lucidly reminds us, both plays a crucially formative role and is itself profoundly affected in the process.[12]

Without getting into a lengthy defense and explanation of the "aims" identified here, I call attention to the fact that excepting for my addition of the category of Instrumental Discourse--in which I would include many of the kinds of discourse commonly known as "instruments," as well as some forms of information, these are basically the traditional Aristotelian-Scholastic categories. The Aristotelian approach works because it incorporates a comprehensive and non-reductionist view of purpose in discourse products. It deals with the total discourse-situation.

Diagram 3: Rhetorical Genus



(Arrows indicate relationships of continuum.)

GENUS

The next category on the scale is that of genus, which names major subdivisions within the Aims, and for which I have named categories only under the heading of Rhetoric. Two comments about them are in order: First, there is a greater departure here from the Aristotelian categories, mainly because the ramifications of the written medium are stronger at this level. The typology identified in Diagram 3 is more in

the nature of a functional typology rather than as in Aristotle, a division based on fields or spheres of activity; nevertheless, the categories of Deliberative, Informative, Reflective, and Performative do not name respectively any single element of form or function or context, but rather denote ways in which these elements come together in total discourse situations. Second, the categories listed here form an interesting pattern of continuums within themselves; and between the levels of genus and "defacto genre"[13] we can begin to specify continuums of intermediate categories. Thus, under the heading of Deliberative rhetoric, I have tentatively identified one such continuum--a functional one from interpretation to criticism, to advocacy, to promotion.

I believe that research at this level holds a great deal of promise for the teaching of composition, because it represents at least partially a re-adaptation and expansion of the classical lore of status, wherein speakers are trained to pinpoint specific functions and problems within specific discourse settings and to devise strategies for solving these problems. What is needed is an expansion of this teaching beyond the confines of speech-making and beyond the confines of policy and legal debate. Unfortunately, the tradition of composition pedagogy remains stubbornly formal--even where it explicitly claims to be teaching students to write "with a purpose"; and perhaps the most important work that is being done in this area is being done in the field of Speech Communication.[14]

Diagram 4: Discourse Strategies

A. Material strategies

(ethical and emotional appeal; prevarication, transcendence, testimony, enactment, etc.)

B. Logical/Topical strategies

(classification, division, definition, cause, comparison, etc.)

C. Formal strategies

(the whole field of disposition)

D. Generic strategies

(conscious appropriation of *de facto* genres)

E. Modal strategies

(conscious appropriation of modes)

F. Stylistic strategies

(formal to casual styles; levels of diction; tone; schemes and tropes)

STRATEGIES

I will say very little about the strategies here, except to point out that they cover and include the traditional arts of invention and disposition, and that in themselves they form a series from meaning or purpose-oriented strategies (material and logical) to form-oriented strategies (formal, generic, and modal and stylistic). One argument I would use to support the place of the Strategies between the categories of Mode and Aim is that they draw from both the higher and the lower categories in the modal and generic strategies.

Diagram 5: The Modes of Written Discourse

	Expressive ↔	Expository ↔	Affective
Discursive ↕	(journal, personal letter, personal testimony)	(this essay)	(magazine and poster advertising)
Narrative ↕	(personal testimony, Huckleberry Finn, E.B. White's "Once More to the Lake")	(history, biography)	(Macauley's "Black Hole of Calcutta")
Dramatic	(Frost's "Stopping By a Woods...")	(Platonic Dialogue)	E. Pound's "In A Station of The Metro," W.C. William's "Spring and All," or "The Yachts"

(Arrows indicate relationships of continuum.)

MODES

The outline of discourse modes presented in diagram 5 is a slightly amended version of the scheme I recently presented and discussed in the Rhetoric Society Quarterly.[15] I have found that the categories presented here are inclusive and that they actually work in describing real-world discourse. The overall scheme of modes is based ultimately on the principle recently articulated by W.J. Ong, that the author-audience relation in written discourse is always a more or less transparent fiction of one sort or another.[16] One important aspect of that relation is what I term "Presence," which identifies a continuum from the illusion of direct author presence in a time and place coincident with the convergence of reader and

script--this is "discursive"--to a fictional author, or no author at all, in a time and place removed from the convergence of reader and script--this is "dramatic." Narrative occupies the middle of the continuum, presenting an author who is more or less "present" but a matter which is removed from the present--to the past.

A second aspect of the fictional relation between author and reader is what I term "direction"--involving a continuum from features and coherence patterns that are "expressive" and author-oriented, to "expository" or subject-oriented, and finally to "affective" or audience-oriented. Rather than entering into a lengthy discussion or defense of these categories, I have filled in the "boxes" on the diagram with the names of some examples that will be easily called to mind by most readers of this essay. The most pertinent things to say about these categories at this point are that, first, they can be readily identified by recognizable formal features of written discourse itself; second, they do describe discourse operations at a level between "medium" and "strategy"; and finally, they do not confuse ways of writing with reasons for writing, as do most current discussions of modes.

Conclusion

A presentation of this sort must conclude abruptly, with only the hope that its audience may find something appropriate about the abruptness. My purpose here has not been so much to urge the adoption of my system of Aims and Modes as to quicken interest in the study itself, and to indicate something of its vitality. Like the ongoing researches into the composing process, this more traditional sort of investigation still holds great potential for teaching as well as a

good deal of intellectual excitement.

NOTES

[1]"Modes of Discourse," in Teaching Composition: 10 Bibliographical Essays, ed. Gary Tate (Fort Worth, Texas: Texas Christian Univ. Press, 1976), pp. 111-36.

[2]A Theory of Discourse (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1971), pp. 48-76.

[3]The Development of Writing Abilities (11-18) (London: Macmillan, 1975), p. 1.

[4]Diane Hacker and Betty Renshaw, A Practical Guide for Writers (Cambridge, Mass.: Winthrop Publishers, 1979).

[5]A Theory of Discourse, p. 29.

[6]"On the Classification of Discourse Performances," Rhetoric Society Quarterly, 7 (1977), 31-40.

[5A]A Theory of Discourse, p. 36.

[7]Rhetoric, Romance, and Technology (Ithaca and London: Cornell Univ. Press, 1971), p. 34.

[8]"The Category Squish: Endstation Hauptwort," in Papers from the 8th Regional Meeting, Chicago Linguistic Society, ed. Paul M. Peranteau, Judith N. Levi, and Gloria C. Phares (Chicago: Chicago Linguistic Society, 1972), pp. 316-28.

[9]"On the Classification of Discourse Performances," Rhetoric Society Quarterly, 7 (1977), 31-40; and "Rhetorical Performative Discourse: A New Theory of Epideictic," Philosophy and Rhetoric, 11 (1978), 221-46.

[10]For an excellent discussion of this distinction see Karl R. Wallace, Understanding Discourse: The Speech Act and Rhetorical Action (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1970), chs. 3 and 4.

[11]Ibid.

[12]Rhetoric, Romance, and Technology, passim.

[13]I borrow this term from Jackson Harrell and Wil A. Linkugel, "On Rhetorical Genre: An Organizing Perspective," Philosophy and Rhetoric, 11 (1978), 262-79.

[14]See esp. Karilyn Kohrs Campbell and Kathleen Hall Jamieson, eds., Form and Genre: Shaping Rhetorical Action (Falls Church, Va.: Speech Communication Association, 1978).

[15]Rhetoric Society Quarterly, 7 (1977), 31-40.

[16]"The Writer's Audience is Always a Fiction," PMLA, 90(1975), 9-22.